

WAR AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:  
THE IMPACT OF THE VIETNAM CONFLICT AND GULF WAR IN AMERICA

by

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## ABSTRACT

The question of citizen participation in American politics continues to inspire social scientists seeking to understand the impact of citizen neglect on democratic legitimacy. By exploring the impact of the Vietnam Conflict and the Gulf War on political participation in the United States, this research provides evidence that American citizens participate at higher rates during times of military conflict than during times of peace. The theoretical frameworks of rational choice and political sophistication help explain how wartime phenomena, such as an increase in free information, greater salience of governmental affairs and focus on the president, motivate citizens to participate. American National Election Studies data aggregated from 1956-1992 for presidential election years provides empirical support that participation measures, such as voting, attempting to influence others to vote, attending political meetings and working for a political party or candidate, increase significantly during times of military conflict, defined as the Vietnam Conflict and Gulf War.

To Michelle Marine, who made this graduate school opportunity possible through her never-ending sense of adventure and willingness to start over every three years.

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## Introduction

The question of citizen participation in American politics, or more correctly, the lack of citizen participation in American politics, continues to inspire social scientists seeking to understand the impact of citizen neglect on democratic legitimacy. Never has this been more apparent than in the wake of 9/11 and the ensuing war on terrorism as academics strive to quantify an apparent surge of patriotism, feelings of civic duty and heightened attentiveness to politics. New questions have surfaced: Did 9/11 increase volunteerism? Did 9/11 influence American's trust of others? Did 9/11 inspire ethnic tolerance? Did 9/11 create a more informed public? Did 9/11 re-engage American citizens in the political process?

Initial answers to these questions are beginning to trickle in as social scientists grapple with the aftermath of this tragic event and the ongoing war America is waging on terror. Only detailed research efforts will add insight concerning the impacts of 9/11 and the current war on terrorism. Despite the inability to draw conclusions about current events, it is possible to look back in time for insight on how past military conflicts shaped the behavior of citizens, especially in regards to political participation in the United States. A more precise knowledge of the past may provide a stronger foundation for understanding current and future events. By exploring the impact of the Vietnam Conflict and the Gulf War on political participation in the United States, this effort will contribute to an awareness of past behavior and provide perspective for the future.

A theoretical framework for understanding the affect of war on political participation can be found in the rational choice models of Downs (1957), Riker and

Ordeshook (1968) and the political sophistication framework posed by Converse (1964), Smith (1989), and others. Given these theoretical frameworks, an initial step toward theoretically linking participation with war lies in the increased salience of foreign affairs and national defense issues during times of national military crisis. Intense media attention on wartime issues will help provide citizens with an abundance of free information and help them formulate that information into sophisticated opinions on complex political issues. This increase in sophistication will drive greater participation. An abundance of free information will also reduce the educational costs associated with informed participation and lower the barriers of a rationally oriented decision to participate. The impact of free information will be amplified by the surge of patriotism felt during times of war and the potentially greater value of nation-confirming participation to citizens when tensions are high and will motivate individuals to action by increasing their perceived benefits of taking part in government. Building on these concepts will produce a plausible and testable framework to explain how war impacts participation.

## Literature Review

The foundation of legitimacy for the American democratic system is the government's ability to provide for the needs and aspirations of American citizens. At the most basic level, legitimacy is conveyed through the popular election of representatives who are charged with securing a government that resonates with the beliefs and attitudes of the represented. A rich body of literature explores the multiple avenues of access to the American political process and identifies electoral participation as one of the most widely available and reaffirming acts of legitimacy. As stated by David Fellman in his introduction to Gerald Pomper's 1968 book, Elections in America, "The American commitment to democracy rests upon universal suffrage which expresses itself through periodical elections. Changes in the power to govern have been accomplished, since the very birth of the republic, through the instrumentality of voting" (Pomper, 1968, p. vii). While Fellman's words seem a common refrain, the significance of their meaning should not be taken lightly.

Simply voting, however, is not enough to ensure a responsive government. Elections only provide input to politicians every two years at the most and six years at the least. Within each term, multiple issues surface and must be addressed for America to prosper. Without more routine validation than elections, politicians are left guessing as to what their constituents need. Citizen responsibility extends beyond voting to other forms of participation, such as keeping up with public events and issues, critically evaluating issues facing our nation, interacting with other citizens to promote individual and common interests and influencing policy decisions on important issues (Kirlin, 2002, p.

573). Political leadership must be made aware of changing national needs and adapt their representation to maintain legitimacy. Still, American citizens seem to be uninterested in guiding and shaping the force that most significantly impacts their life. As Pomper suggests, America's "abandonment of politics is dismaying...they imply that American democracy is weak and fraudulent" (Pomper, 1968, p. ix). One of the core questions in American political studies is why participation is so low in a country that prides itself on independence and self-government.

An initial review focused on the relationship between war and participation turned up only one cursory theoretical attempt offered by Robert Lane in his 1959 book, Political Life. Lane's primary interest was exploring how specific issues shaped voter turnout. This focus led him to a more obvious focus on domestic affairs as a source for higher or lower turnout rates. "As for the nature of the issues which seem most closely associated with a higher turnout, it is normally true that domestic and economic issues attract the greatest attention...but the impact of wars upon electoral turnout seems nevertheless to be significant" (Lane, 1959, p. 5). Lane relies on a self-constructed set of raw turnout rate data from 1824 – 1952 to conclude "turnout tends to be high on the eve of wars and lower in post-war periods," a pattern he suggests is consistent with the increasing salience of foreign policy and defense during war build-ups and the ensuing post-war slump which is the result of citizen fatigue from continued interest throughout the war (Lane, 1959, p. 5).

He cites this cycle as the case for the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, World War I and World War II. He does not include the Korean War because 1952 data

represents a war-year election with no post-war data available at the time. He concludes discussion on this topic by summarizing, “the politics of pre-war periods attract popular interest and participation in public affairs; the politics of post-war periods fail to attract such interest and participation” (Lane, 1959, p. 6). This brief effort by Lane represents the extent of previous work on the specific impact of war on participation, leaving much room further study.

### *Rational Choice Models*

Rational choice models provide an initial framework for explaining a change in citizen participation during times of war. In general, a rational choice calculus approach attempts to frame a citizen’s decision to participate or not participate in the economic terms of a cost-benefit analysis. Anthony Downs posed the first such model in his seminal 1957 work, An Economic Theoretical Framework of Democracy. In this book, Downs suggested participation decisions could be weighed individually on a scale of personal cost of accomplishing the activity versus personal gain experienced as the result of accomplishing the activity.

Downs’ decision-making equation takes the form of  $R = PB - C$ , where  $R$  is the reward of individual utilities received from participating,  $P$  is the probability the citizen will bring about the benefit through their act (cast the tie-breaking vote, provide the crucial fact necessary to sway legislation),  $B$  is the differential benefit citizens receive if their preferred interest is advanced rather than the opposing interest,  $C$  is the individual cost of participating including time spent gathering information to make a candidate or position decision as well as time taken to physically participate. By this logic, if the value

of  $R$  is positive, the decision will be to participate whereas if  $R$  is negative, the decision will be to refrain from participating. Downs' straightforward approach, with one significant addition, remains a dominant theoretical framework for explaining rational choice-based decisions to participate.

In 1968, William Riker and Peter Ordeshook expanded Downs' model to include an additional benefit experienced by citizens as articulated in their article, "A Theoretical Framework Calculus of Voting." Riker and Ordeshook make a sizeable contribution to the model by introducing the 'D' variable designed to capture a voter's sense of civic duty and obligation to participate and the inherent satisfaction gained from "affirming their allegiance to the political system" (Riker & Ordeshook, 1968, p. 28). As presented by Riker and Ordeshook, the amended calculus for voting equation reads  $R = PB - C + D$ . The authors confirm the worth of their formula via tests performed on 1952-1960 Presidential elections via National Election Study (NES) survey data. Through their evaluation, they reasonably conclude that their addition of the 'D' variable further explains participation.

In response to Riker and Ordeshook and other rational choice adherents, John Ferejohn and Morris Fiorina offer that voting can be explained rationally without placing emphasis on the act of voting (D) in their 1974 article, "The Paradox of Not Voting: A Decision Theoretic Analysis." Through a comparison of the utility maximizing (Downs) and minimax regret (Savage) decision-making frameworks, Ferejohn and Fiorina show that the definition of what is a 'rational' choice varies within society and impacts the explanatory power of a rational choice model. Ferejohn and Fiorina conclude that

alternate rational choice models provide insight to people drawing on different rationality criteria and that a single model cannot be applied universally to all people. For instance, in a model emphasizing utility maximization only, citizens should be compelled to vote only in the most extreme conditions. On the other hand, Ferejohn and Fiorina show that “minimax regret decision makers need little incentive to participate” as the benefit received from minimizing their regret for not making themselves heard on important issues such as protracted war and high casualties is easily greater than the cost of participation (1974, p. 535). Despite the rationality criteria chosen, they find that “a high cost of voting restricts the range of preferences which justify voting” (Ferejohn & Fiorina, 1974, p. 535), suggesting that lower voting costs would increase participation. While Ferejohn and Fiorina cast doubt on the parsimony of any one rational choice model, they compellingly support the underlying rational choice calculus theoretical framework.<sup>1</sup>

Within a rational choice framework, Orley Ashenfelter and Stanley Kelley, Jr. take a broad approach to the study of participation by including age, sex, race, education, income and length of residency in their 1975 article, “Determinants of Participation in Presidential Elections.” Their overarching goal is to determine the impacts of voting law changes such as the 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Amendments, which outlawed the poll tax and decreased the voting age from 21 to 18, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and 1970 that

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<sup>1</sup> Not all researchers agree that rational choice frameworks are applicable for explaining participation. For further explanation, see: Green, Donald and Ian Shapiro (1994). Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science, New Haven: Yale University Press.

ultimately enabled blacks to vote and reduced length of residency requirements for voting.

Using opinion surveys conducted by the Survey Research Center (SRC) on the 1960 and 1972 presidential elections, they conduct a probit analysis of the impact of individual factors on voting. The authors acknowledge the known over reporting bias in SRC surveys, suggesting upwards of 7-10% in the years studied, but move ahead with the data because it also captures socioeconomic information essential to their study. This is a common decision made by almost all researchers utilizing NES/SRC data. They measure education by total years of schooling, income as absolute income figures and race as white or black. They also measure interest in the campaign, competitiveness of the race and attitudes toward an obligation to participate via predictable survey questions.

Their findings show the only socioeconomic factor having significant impact on voting is education; while sex, income and race have negligible impacts on voting. Finally, they show that feelings of obligation to participate, interest in the campaign and race competitiveness also have a significant positive impact on the decision to vote and conclude that the institutional measures mentioned above have had a positive impact on participation. In this effort, Ashenfelter and Kelley quantify the impact of the 'D' – or civic duty – variable on participation and identify several factors affecting participation that must be considered when attempting to isolate for the impacts of military conflict.

As a final note on rational choice models, it becomes apparent that a high cost of participating will negatively impact participation. However, cost of participating is not simple to measure and consists of variables such as citizen registration laws, polling



locations and hours of operation, citizen interest and knowledge levels and most significantly, the cost of obtaining information on candidates and issues. All of these activities take valuable time and effort, thereby increasing the importance of direct access to the political process and emphasizing the importance of free information provided to citizens. Under rational choice assumptions, if the cost of obtaining information is decreased, the cost of participating will also be decreased. This combination raises the potential that a citizen will rationally decide to participate.

### *Sophistication Models*

A second clue for deciphering the impact of war can be found in the political sophistication approach to understanding participation. A theoretical framework of political sophistication suggests that the more sophisticated an individual is, the more likely they are to participate in politics. Philip Converse initially presents the underlying principles for this approach in his 1964 work, The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics, as the concept of belief systems. A citizen's belief system can be described by three characteristics, according to Converse, which are: 1) the range or number of opinions an individual holds concerning political issues; 2) attitude consistency across a spectrum of issues; and 3) level of conception or the extent an individual uses ideological terms such as liberalism and conservatism to organize their beliefs (Converse, 1964, p. 208). According to Converse, for a person to be sophisticated they must have a wide range of opinions on multiple political issues, maintain consistent attitudes across their range of opinions and organize their opinions in reference to ideological abstractions.

Eric Smith tweaks Converse's definition of belief system to capture the full meaning of sophistication in his 1989 book, The Unchanging American Voter, by including the amount of factual information a person possesses (Smith, 1989, p. 4). By including factual information, Smith clarifies that a person cannot be politically sophisticated without having a significant amount of information about politics (Smith, 1989, p. 5). He presents a solid definition for political sophistication as having four characteristics: "range of opinions, attitude consistency, level of conceptualization and amount of factual information" (Smith, 1989, p. 5). Smith goes on to explain why sophistication is an important determinant of participation by suggesting that an underlying assumption of democratic government "is that people have some understanding of how their votes and other political action influence the government. That understanding stems from sophistication" (Smith, 1989, p. 6). It follows that if citizens understand the issues and their ability to impact government, they are better equipped to exert their influence. It also follows that education is closely linked with sophistication because the skills required to obtain and maintain the elements of sophistication are significantly enhanced through education, with the ability to access and comprehend factual information as most important.

Henry Brady, Sidney Verba and Kay Schlozman advance the concept of resources as precursors to political turnout in their 1995 article, "Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Political Participation." In this article, the authors present a model for political participation based on the resources of time, money and civic skills. They propose that these skills are acquired early in life, are developed in nonpolitical settings and are

essential to participating in political activity. Additionally, they suggest that these resources are developed at the workplace, social organizations and churches or synagogues and have a significant effect on overall political activity, explaining why socioeconomic status (SES) is important in predicting participation. They focus on three types of political activity, giving time, donating money and voting, and show that different resources are important for each task.

The concept of civic skill is operationalized through the variable of skill-acts by arguing that actual performance of civic duty displays possession of the required civic skill. The authors also show that free time and wealth are not correlated, showing equal opportunity for turnout despite differences in SES. In addition, they show church or synagogue interaction offers equal opportunity for development of civic skills, regardless of SES. They conclude that the presence of these resources positively impact political turnout and provide a better means of predicting turnout than SES alone. By incorporating the concept of resource availability into a broader definition of political sophistication, the authors lend strength to the argument that citizens must possess basic skills to be motivated to participate.

In their effort to emphasize the importance of civic skills, Brady, Verba and Schlozman also underscore the explanatory value of SES variables such as age, income, and education. Raymond Wolfinger and Steven Rosenstone add to the list of variables impacting participation in their 1980 book, Who Votes? by showing that demographics such as age, gender, race, place of residence and employment status, in addition to SES variables, also influence participatory levels. Most importantly, the authors underscore

the multiple forces impacting participation and the importance of considering all factors when developing explanations of why people do or do not participate.

It is also important to review research by John Aldrich, John Sullivan and Eugene Borgida that discusses the salience of foreign and defense issues among voters. While popular scholarly opinion said that citizens lacked access to information and coherent opinions on these subjects, the authors posed contrasting findings in their 1989 article, “Foreign Affairs and Issue Voting: Do Presidential Candidates Waltz Before a Blind Audience?” Their research provides evidence that voters do have the information necessary to form opinions on foreign and defense issues and perceive clear differences between candidate positions. The authors find that “greater discussion and coverage should...accentuate the accessibility of foreign policy attitudes” (Aldrich, Sullivan and Borgida, 1989, p. 135). They conclude that foreign and defense issues are salient among voters and impact their decision-making process.

After reviewing rational choice and political sophistication literature, it becomes possible to meld the two complimentary theories, pulling from the strengths of each to increase explanatory power. Rational choice theories contend that participating decisions are made on a cost-analysis basis using an economic decision-making logic. An element of significant importance in the participation calculus equation is the cost of acting, which is primarily driven by the cost of obtaining information. The importance of information is also important to political sophistication models as an essential ingredient to developing a wide range of in-depth, coherent and relevant political opinions that motivate participation. By drawing from both the rational choice and political

sophistication approaches, it is possible to develop a theoretical framework illustrating why times of war should impact participation levels in America.

This effort focuses primarily on the impact of war on participation as couched within rational choice and political sophistication frameworks. Perhaps the greatest strength of this approach is that these frameworks are girded by a SES model which provides a foundation for explaining all forms of participation in American politics based on key indicators of social and economic status that repeatedly differentiate participants from non-participants. The SES model has evolved to focus on explaining participation in three broad categories<sup>2</sup>. First, SES models seek to explain the tendency of higher SES status citizens to participate in more complex political activities while participation is limited to primarily to voting for lower SES citizens (Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba, Nie and Kim, 1978). Second, they focus on how SES is related to individual political attitudes and motivations which are mainly driven by political interest and efficacy (Almond & Verba, 1963; Barnes & Kaase, 1979; Kaase & Marsh, 1979; Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba, Nie & Kim, 1978). They also attempt to show how the individual elements of SES impact participation (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). Finally, SES models look to explain factors that decrease the impact of SES, such as group mobilization and group consciousness (Olsen, 1982; Verba & Nie, 1972).

Rational choice and sophistication models leverage this SES foundation to further explain impacts on behavior and prove especially useful in high information

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<sup>2</sup> This SES model summary was adapted from the 1995 article "Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Political Participation" by Brady, Verba and Schlozman, which provides a thorough summary of SES model variations in endnote four of the article on page 290.

environments such as times of war. By building on the core concepts presented in SES models, it is possible to develop a framework designed to isolate the impacts of war from other known influences on participation and analyze the specific contribution of military conflict in explaining variances in participation.

## Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

There are two theoretical frameworks that yield predictions for increased participation during times of war: rational choice and political sophistication theories. Key to each is the impact presented by an increased salience of foreign affairs and national defense issues during times of national military crisis. Building on these approaches will produce a logical theoretical framework of how war increases participation. Justification of assumptions begins this effort, followed by development of the war and participation framework and statement of hypotheses.

Two basic assumptions are necessary: 1) war increases citizen attentiveness and salience of political issues; and 2) the American public tends to rally around the president during times of international crisis. The first assumption suggests that significantly extensive media coverage during times of war heightens national awareness by increasing the salience of national security in the minds of individual citizens. George Marcus and Michael MacKuen support this notion in their study of learning and involvement during political campaigns, providing evidence that “threat powerfully motivates citizens to learn about politics” (Marcus & MacKuen, 1993, p. 672). This is coupled with the idea that national crisis increases public interest in current events which in turn drives higher news consumption (Althaus, 2002). Given the critical impact of war on the country and the personal implications it may have on its citizens, an assumption of increased public awareness of political issues during times of national military crisis seems plausible.

Another assumption is that America experiences a ‘rally around the president’ mentality during times of international crisis, with increased focus on the president as the

primary leadership figure. This is contrasted with times of domestic crisis that still hold the president accountable, but also focus on Congress and the capitalist system as responsible parties. An assumption of presidential primacy during war is supported by J. Mueller in his 1970 article, "Presidential Popularity from Truman to Johnson," where he tests the impact of international events involving the United States on presidential approval ratings. His research shows the President is directly evaluated by American citizens on his ability to handle "specific, dramatic and sharply focused" international political events (Mueller, 1970, p. 330).

It is even argued that the role of the president assumes a quasi-religious quality in a secular society such as the United States since he is the primary focus of a governmental structure that closely mirrors religious structure. In this structure, the role of the presidency symbolizes the ultimate nature of state power (Verba, 1965). This phenomenon is also supported by behavioral research on the presidency that claims the president is by far the best-known political figure and often the only known political figure, that there is much respect for the Office of the President despite general cynicism about the political process and that there is a tendency to rally in support of the president, especially when he is acting in times of international crisis (Greenberg, 1965).

Given the prominence the American political structure provides the Office of the President for handling foreign affairs and the fact that the president is the one, singly identifiable spokesman for America, rallying around the president is logical. Based on this assumption of presidential primacy, American involvement in international conflict should be directly attributed to the actions of the president. In turn, political interest and



participation should peak during presidential elections occurring during or shortly after times of military conflict. Presidential primacy in foreign affairs will focus citizen participation efforts around presidential elections because of a greater awareness of politics during this time and a heightened focus on the president due to war. For this reason, NES surveys conducted during presidential election years should best capture the impacts of military conflict on participation.

With these assumptions, it is now possible to draw from both rational choice and political sophistication models to develop this theoretical framework. For starters, an essential element of political sophistication, as presented by Smith (1989), is a citizen's range of opinions and their amount of factual information. During times of war the amount of factual information increases significantly. Furthermore, the amount of free information multiplies exponentially. Simply put, war is news. Military build-ups, National Guard and Reserve activations, troop mobilizations, aggression against American interests, White House press conferences – all of these lead to front page newspaper stories, non-stop radio commentary and in the modern era, 24-hour “CNN Special Report” television news coverage. Arguably, during times of war, citizens must try *not* to gain free information. While individuals do not absorb information at the same rate, constant exposure does increase the information level of many people. In this sense, war sophisticates citizens by default. An increase in free information furthers opinion development and increases interest in politics, especially during times of military conflict and national crisis. As suggested by Converse (1964) and Smith (1989), a greater range

of opinions and better access to factual information will increase political sophistication and have a positive impact on citizen participation.

Rational choice theories also illuminate the link between war and participation. Two elements of the rational choice equation are altered by national military crisis: cost (C) and duty (D). For the reasons suggested above, free information is more prevalent during times of war. The result is a decreased cost incurred by the citizen to develop issue and candidate opinions necessary to feel they can adequately contribute to the political process. While the physical effort required in driving to the polling location and casting a ballot remains the same, bountiful amounts of free information can significantly reduce opinion-forming costs of participating.

Of equal significance to increased participation is the gratification a citizen feels when participating due to the act of participating itself. Arguably, national pride surges in times of war as the country defines itself against a common enemy. The extent of this effect will vary with the nature of the conflict and how the President handles it, but in most cases war rallies America and results in a resurgence of patriotism (Brody, 1991). The reassertion of national pride is signified by a desire of citizens to reaffirm the legitimacy of their country and the ideals on which it was founded. By participating, people are able to feel good about 'doing their part;' a feeling that should become greater when national pride is high. By increasing the benefit citizens feel from performing their duty of participating, the rallying effects of war increase the potential that the benefits of participation will outweigh the costs, leading to a rational decision to participate.

By combining political sophistication and rational choice approaches, a war and participating framework has been developed that logically links an increase in free factual information, an increase in the salience of national security issues and an increase in feelings of civic duty present during times of war to an amplified interest in democratic participation by American citizens. As a result, citizen participation is expected to increase during times of national military crisis. The following hypotheses were generated to test this framework:

- 1) Political participation will increase during times of national military crisis.
- 2) Political participation will decline after resolution of national military crisis.

## Definitions and Measurements

Hypothesis testing is conducted using the American National Election Studies Cumulative Data File: 1948-1998 (ICPSR 8475), which pools common variables from each of the biennial National Election Studies (NES) conducted since 1948 (Miller & NES, 1999). This powerful data set includes variables that appeared in at least three surveys and have been recoded to be consistent across the time span. The original data set was refined to represent only presidential elections occurring from 1956-1996 and further recoded to facilitate comparisons within this study. While the focus on presidential election years was primarily driven by a lack of consistent questions asked in the NES during off years, evidence of presidential primacy in foreign affairs and the identification of the president as the paramount representative of America discussed below provide solid theoretical rationale for focusing research efforts on these cases. Similarly, inclusion of the Korean War in this study was not possible due to inconsistent questions posed in earlier NES studies. While some basic measures could be taken from the 1948-1956 timeframe, the data lacked sufficient control variables needed to isolate the impact of war. A complete description of variables and coding can be found in Appendix 1, Variable Definitions. Additionally, missing cases in control variables were replaced with the variable mean to preserve maximum sample size. Missing cases in primary independent and dependent variables were eliminated from the sample. A complete summary of data correction can be found in Appendix 2, Data Correction.

While the rich nature of this data set provides significant strength by allowing for multiple control variables, it is widely held that self-reported acts of participation are

historically overstated. For example, self-reported voter turnout may be exaggerated by 8-15% at times; however, similar overstatement is assumed in all elections (Ashenfelter & Kelley, 1975, p. 701). Despite inaccuracies, Reiter (1979) suggests that while self-reported turnout is, “well above that reported by the Census Bureau’s aggregate data...the trend over time is parallel to the aggregate data trend, and as we examine groups in the population we must assume that the degree of over reporting is comparable among all of them” (Reiter, 1979, p. 298).

Further, Abramson and Aldrich (1982) present three justifications for using NES survey data. They argue that self-reported data closely parallels real world trends as validated by electoral statistics and Census data. They also suggest that overestimates are relatively equal across various groups and that the NES has validated turnout trends against voting records since 1972, two points that further support the usefulness of this data. Abramson and Aldrich also highlight the fact that NES studies interview proportionally fewer nonvoters and that these nonvoters may not capture the true attitudes of the population as a whole. This known limitation should be considered when evaluating findings derived from this data set but is not grounds for abandoning the wealth of information also captured by the NES. For this effort, it is assumed that over reporting is most likely present in all self-reported measures but is comparable across surveys and has a negligible impact on comparative relationships.

Political participation represents the dependent variable and is defined as citizen involvement in the democratic governmental process as signified by an attempt to have their opinion heard. As citizens can participate in many ways, ranging from voting and

writing letters to politicians to organizing political rallies, participation is measured by an index of self-reported activities derived from four questions asked in the NES study. The index consists of a count of individual participation in the following areas: attempt to influence others to vote, attend political meetings, work for party or candidate and vote in election, specifically determined by the following NES questions 1) Did respondent vote in election?; 2) Did respondent try to influence others to vote?; 3) Did respondent attend political meetings?; and 4) Did respondent work for party or candidate? Each positive response (respondent performed activity) was added to their participation score, resulting in a participation index ranging from 0 (none) to 4 (performed every activity). In a few instances, the respondent did not provide an answer for each question. To preserve cases, their lack of response was coded as 0 (did not perform activity) and an index score was generated. If anything, this step will make it more difficult to show an increase in participation and strengthen findings of that nature. While including more activities in the index count may have provided a broader measure of participation absence of comparable data limited measurement to these four items.

National military crisis represents the primary independent variable in this study and is defined as a declared war by Congress or an event where the American public was aware of a threat to national security and the threat was countered by a large-scale (1000+ troops) commitment to hostility. Unmistakably, declared war alerts American citizens to a threat and prompts the increase in media coverage and rally around the flag responses discussed above. In a similar manner, large-scale commitment of troops signifies significant American interest in a conflict and places numerous American lives in danger,

also prompting media coverage and the potential for resurgence of national pride, depending on the nature of the conflict. The timeframe of each conflict is measured from the declaration of war or date 1000+ troops were committed until the date of surrender, truce, cease-fire or troop withdrawal. In the case of the Gulf War, no presidential election occurred during the timeframe of conflict. However, war issues still maintained salience in the Fall 2002, as identified by Gerald Pomper in his 1993 book, *The Election of 1992*. Pomper suggests that Bush campaigned heavily on Gulf War and international affairs and was attacked on these topics by Clinton in speeches, the media and presidential debates. American troops also maintained a physical presence in Iraq and the Middle East through the election, keeping war issues salient in the media. For these reasons, the impact of the Gulf War should be captured in the 1992 NES data.

Great effort was expended to find an individual-level measure for war that would not only adequately measure the concept presented but also remain true to the thoughts and feelings of respondents as captured via NES questions. The search seemed promising at first, as questions asking the respondents' level of concern about war and their opinion on the chances of United States involvement in war were discovered for the Vietnam era. However, closer analysis found that comparable questions were not asked in the years leading up to or following the conflict. Unfortunately, the precise concept of war was not measured consistently by the NES at the individual level. To overcome this limitation, an aggregate variable for war was constructed where presidential elections occurring during times of national military crisis are coded as 1 and remaining years are coded 0. For this

measure, elections years corresponding to the Vietnam Conflict (1968 and 1972) and the Gulf War (1992) meet the criteria of war years.

It is important to acknowledge that this shift in level of analysis was taken for utilitarian reasons alone and places serious limitations on this research. For example, introducing an aggregate level independent variable begs for inclusion of aggregate level control variables, such as the impact of real per capita income, the presence of a third party candidate or the Kennedy Assassination. Simply coding the War Year variable as 1 or 0 allows the political science phenomenon of interest to be contaminated by other aggregate variables that may impact participation and coincide with a war year. Without robust aggregate level controls it is impossible to determine precisely if the war is driving changes in participation or if they are influenced by other events. However, including aggregate level controls is not a simple task. Blindly introducing one or two issues thought to have an impact, such as gross domestic product or the presence of a third party candidate, provides little insight with a full evaluation of all possible aggregate level variables. While such an evaluation would strengthen this research, it is beyond the scope of this endeavor. For this reason, readers are cautioned to consider the possible impact of aggregate level variables that are acknowledged but not addressed in this effort.<sup>3</sup>

Additional independent variables are included to control for factors also known to explain participation, such as age, gender, education, south/non south residence, income, strength of partisanship, feelings of external efficacy, government responsiveness and

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<sup>3</sup> The lack of a consistent individual level measure of war highlights a limitation of current statistical measures. Without a comparable measure of war at the individual level, it is impossible to empirically test the impacts of war on political phenomenon and report results with certainty. This is an area deserving further attention by statistical researchers.



trust in government, media exposure and variances in personal financial situations. To

further clarify, variables are assigned as followed for this study:

Y = Participation Count

X<sub>1</sub> = War Year

X<sub>2</sub> = Age (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980)

X<sub>3</sub> = Gender (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980)

X<sub>4</sub> = Education (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980)

X<sub>5</sub> = South/non South residence (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980)

X<sub>6</sub> = Income (Brady, Verba and Schlozman, 1995)

X<sub>7</sub> = Strength of Partisanship (Campbell, 1960)

X<sub>8</sub> = Index of external efficacy (Campbell, 1960; Abramson & Aldrich, 1982; and Brady et al., 1995)

X<sub>9</sub> = Index of government responsiveness (Brody & Sniderman, 1977)

X<sub>10</sub> = Index of trust in government (Brody & Sniderman, 1977)

X<sub>11</sub> = Index of media exposure (Zaller, 1992)

X<sub>12</sub> = Personal financial situations in past year (Rosenstone, 1982)

X<sub>13</sub> = Civic Duty (Campbell, 1960)

## Analysis and Discussion

Ordinary least squares regression was employed to explain the impact war has on participation. An additive model produced the results presented in Table 1. The R square of 0.24 indicates that the specified model explains nearly 25% of the variation in participation, which is respectable for individual level data. It is also important to note that each variable in the model has a statistically significant impact on participation ( $p = 0.0001$ ).

The findings in Table 1 indicate that war has a significant impact on participation. The coefficient assessing the war variable suggests that the presence of war positively influences involvement in the democratic process. The strength of the War Year coefficient, 0.09, indicates that individuals exposed to war are more likely to involve themselves as citizens, compared to individuals during times of peace. More broadly, the increase equates to involvement in roughly 8.5 more participation activities per 100 people during times of war<sup>4</sup>. When applied to the November 2000 United State's voting age population of 186 million citizens (Jamieson, Shin & Day, 2002), a war is expected to generate roughly 158, 732 more acts of participation nation-wide.

The coefficients assessing the control variables are signed in expected directions and all independent variables defeat the null hypothesis. In addition, all variables display a positive relationship to participation except gender and trust in government. These variables are inversely related to participation. Trust in government is coded on a scale

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<sup>4</sup> If one person participates in 0.085 more activities during times of war, 100 people would participate in 8.5 more activities ( $100 \times 0.085$ ). Further, the population of America, measured at 186 million citizens, will participate in 158,732 more activities ( $1.860.000 \times 0.085$ ).

Table 1

*Impact of War on Participation – OLS Regression*

Variable	B	Sb	Beta	t	Sig*	Mean
Constant	-0.738	.046		-16.039	.000	
X <sub>1</sub> = War Year	0.085	.012	.044	6.903	.000	0.466
X <sub>2</sub> = Age	0.021	.004	.041	5.977	.000	3.590
X <sub>3</sub> = Gender	-0.074	.012	-.042	-6.411	.000	1.560
X <sub>4</sub> = Education	0.136	.007	.144	19.915	.000	2.350
X <sub>5</sub> = South/non South	0.072	.013	.037	5.623	.000	1.720
X <sub>6</sub> = Income	0.008	.006	.098	13.526	.000	2.880
X <sub>7</sub> = Partisanship	0.144	.006	.160	24.336	.000	2.840
X <sub>8</sub> = External efficacy	0.003	.000	.121	16.905	.000	56.760
X <sub>9</sub> = Gov't responsive	0.001	.000	.026	3.587	.000	56.260
X <sub>10</sub> = Trust in gov't	-0.003	.000	-.070	-9.925	.000	35.190
X <sub>11</sub> = Media exposure	0.191	.006	.223	32.372	.000	3.260
X <sub>12</sub> = Financial situation	0.032	.009	.024	3.722	.000	1.920
X <sub>13</sub> = Civic Duty	0.310	.014	.144	22.204	.000	0.196
n = 18,605      R Sq = 0.243      Std Error of the Estimate = 0.772						

## Notes:

Regression was performed with 88% of data due to lack of responses (missing cases) in independent variable questions concerning participation and voting. Logistics regression was performed on missing cases (where those who answered the questions were coded 1 and those who did not were coded 0) against each control variable and identified a significant positive correlation between answering the questions and Education, Non-South residency, Partisanship, Trust in Government, Media Exposure and Civic Duty. A significant, although slight, negative correlation was found between answering the questions and feelings of Government Responsiveness. As a result, the sample used in this research is knowingly biased toward respondents with the characteristics listed above. While this presents a known limitation in this design, data unavailability prevented further correction of this problem.

Inter-item correlations were analyzed via Pearson's R with no significant problems of multicollinearity detected.

\*p < .01.

ranging from 0-100 with 0 representing low and 100 representing high levels of trust. Literature supports the inverse relationship found between trust and participation, as citizens feeling high levels of confidence in the government do not find it necessary to protect their interests through participation (Hadley, 1978).

To push the analysis a step further, the Participation Index was recoded into a binary variable so that any form of participation is coded 1, otherwise is coded 0. The logic for this decision rests on two concepts. The first is an analytical problem. Ordinary least squares regression is inefficient when the dependent variable is badly skewed<sup>5</sup>. The second is conceptually related to the idea that a significant amount of measurement error exists concerning questions of participation, considering most people do not want to admit to no involvement in governmental affairs. By lumping all answers into on single category, the measurement error is reduced, as citizens are not required to recall a specific form of participation, but to merely recall if they participated in some form or not.

As in Table 1, model fit was acceptable (Chi Square = 5059.327, correctly predicted = 81.3%). Also, the War Year variable remained statistically significant. Likewise, all control variables maintained statistical significance and were signed in hypothesized directions. This analysis further supports the notion that war influences participation.

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<sup>5</sup> Distribution of the Participation Index variable shows that 21.2% of respondents scored 0, 47.2% scored 1, 25% scored 2, 4.7% scored 3 and 1.9% scored 4. As a result, the variable is skewed toward voting as the only form of participation (coded 1) and away from higher levels of participation (coded 3 and 4).

Table 2

*Impact of War on Participation – LOGIT*

Variable	B	Sb	Beta	t	Sig*	Mean
Constant	-4.734	.169		-28.012	.000	
X <sub>1</sub> = War Year	.161	.044	0.085	3.659	.000	0.466
X <sub>2</sub> = Age	.173	.012	0.337	14.417	.000	3.590
X <sub>3</sub> = Gender	-.126	.042	-0.071	-3.000	.002	1.560
X <sub>4</sub> = Education	.420	.028	0.443	15.000	.000	2.350
X <sub>5</sub> = South/non south	.413	.043	0.209	9.605	.000	1.720
X <sub>6</sub> = Income	.274	.021	0.342	13.048	.000	2.880
X <sub>7</sub> = Partisanship	.353	.020	0.394	17.650	.000	2.840
X <sub>8</sub> = External efficacy	.007	.001	0.319	7.000	.000	56.760
X <sub>9</sub> = Gov't responsive	.006	.001	0.168	6.000	.000	56.260
X <sub>10</sub> = Trust in gov't	-.007	.001	-0.166	-7.000	.000	35.190
X <sub>11</sub> = Media exposure	.505	.022	0.568	22.955	.000	3.260
X <sub>12</sub> = Financial situation	.103	.030	0.078	3.433	.001	1.920
X <sub>13</sub> = Civic Duty	8.688	2.385	3.889	3.643	.000	0.196
<hr/>						
n = 21,134	Correctly predicted = 83.7%			Chi Square = 5059.327		

Note: \*p < .05.

These results show that no matter how you code the dependent variable, war shapes participation broadly measured. More importantly, the findings from Table 1 and 2 conform directly to the theoretical frameworks advanced above. Irrespective of the precise mechanism, the consistent results provide support for the notion that war heightens participation.

The final step in the analysis is to disentangle the Participation Index. A review of the index suggests that the primary act of participation was voting; it is the one common activity across millions of voters. This is supported by previous literature, which suggests

that voting is the most basic element of participation in the United States (Pomper, 1968). Indeed, 74% of respondents reported voting in the corresponding election and for two-thirds of those respondents voting was their only form of participation. This analysis begs the question: Does war influence voting? To determine if war affects the likelihood of voting, logistical regression was employed to determine the impact of war on individual decisions to vote or not vote. The findings are presented in Table 3. The model in general predicts differences in turnout quite well (Chi Square = 6374.03, correctly predicted = 74.3%). In this model, consistent with the analysis in Table 1 and 2, the control variables behave as hypothesized. However, the War Year variable was only found to be significant at  $p < 0.08$ , that is, the unstandardized coefficient for war fails to defeat the null hypothesis as defined by a two-tailed test. Given a solid theoretical framework that expects a positive correlation between war and voting, though, it is possible to employ a less stringent one-tailed test that accounts for error only in the hypothesized direction. Using this criterion, War Year is found to have a positive correlation with voting. While a less stringent test provides less convincing evidence, these results do support the notion that war positively impacts participation as found in previous tables.

A few comparisons can be drawn across the three tables. A difference in the relative strength of the independent variable of interest across the models is seen by examining Table 1 and Table 2. In Table 1, the Beta coefficient indicating War Year ranks seventh among the 13 independent variables in explanatory power. In Table 2, War Year falls to tenth in terms of relative strength.

Table 3

*Impact of War on Vote/Not Vote – LOGIT*

Variable	B	Sb	Beta	t	Sig*	Mean
Constant	-5.914	.174		-33.989	.000	
X <sub>1</sub> = War Year	.067	.043	0.035	1.558	.126	0.466
X <sub>2</sub> = Age	.258	.013	0.502	19.846	.000	3.590
X <sub>3</sub> = Gender	-.015	.041	-0.008	-0.366	.717	1.560
X <sub>4</sub> = Education	.454	.027	0.478	16.815	.000	2.350
X <sub>5</sub> = South/non south	.523	.043	0.264	12.163	.000	1.720
X <sub>6</sub> = Income	.321	.021	0.401	15.286	.000	2.880
X <sub>7</sub> = Partisanship	.392	.021	0.438	18.667	.000	2.840
X <sub>8</sub> = External efficacy	.008	.001	0.364	8.000	.000	56.760
X <sub>9</sub> = Gov't responsive	.003	.001	0.084	3.000	.000	56.260
X <sub>10</sub> = Trust in gov't	-.005	.001	-0.118	-5.000	.000	35.190
X <sub>11</sub> = Media exposure	.417	.021	0.469	19.857	.000	3.260
X <sub>12</sub> = Financial situation	.090	.030	0.068	3.000	.003	1.920
X <sub>13</sub> = Civic Duty	9.300	2.376	4.163	3.914	.000	0.196
<hr/>						
n = 18,861	Correctly predicted = 74.3%			Chi Square = 3674.030		

Note: \*p < .05.

Turning to the other independent variables, the relative explanatory strength of Civic Duty in each table supports the efforts of Brody (1991) that suggest feelings of civic duty run high during times of war and provide strong explanation for increases in participation. The impact of Civic Duty seems to be common across all measurements of participation, included voting considered separately. Media Exposure is also an important explainer of participation, as media coverage increases political issue salience during times of war and helps drive increased participation. More insightful is that Media

Exposure seems to drive more sophisticated forms of participation measured by the Participation Index, but has less explanatory power when modeled only against voting.

A final question is found in the discontinuity of results in Table 3 compared Tables 1 and 2. How is it possible that war statistically impacts participation broadly defined as voting and other more complex forms of political activity when it fails to impact participation measured as voting alone at similar levels of significance? What is driving this difference in voting, the political activity more Americans participate in than any other? An answer may be that war heightens more complex forms of participation, whereas the act of voting is more of a habit. It is possible that war raises consciousness of political issues and encourages citizens to become more directly involved in the political process via complex forms of participation without impacting their entrenched voting habits.



## Conclusion

William Lyons and Robert Alexander illustrate the importance of participation by summarizing de Toqueville in the introduction to their 2000 article, “A Tale of Two Electorates”:

In Democracy in America, Alexis de Toqueville alluded to the difference between a subject and a citizen. The former passively allows the government to initiate and carry out public policy; the latter actively participates in the rituals of democracy. In many ways the legitimacy of a democratic polity can be cast as a function of the ratio of citizens to subjects” (Pg. 1014).

In a country where participation equals freedom, a better understanding of why citizens are or are not compelled to participate will help clarify the source of legitimacy in American democracy.

The war and participation framework suggests that an increase in political issue salience driven by increased media exposure, compounded with the decreased cost of gaining information and increased benefit of affirming civic duties will positively impact political participation during times of war. When applying this framework to the Vietnam Conflict and the Gulf War, it becomes apparent that individuals do take a more active role in government when faced with the threat of war. As validated by empirical evidence, military conflict heightens media exposure and a sense of civic duty and increases participation. More importantly, war seems to generate more sophisticated forms of participation, such as attempting to influence others to vote, attending political meetings and becoming involved in the election process. While participation lags during

peacetime, evidence shows that Americans do pay attention when the stakes are raised. The increased interest of citizens during times of war is essential to legitimizing significant governmental decisions such as the use of force.

What does it mean for the legitimacy of American democracy, however, if citizens are paying attention only when they feel their national identity threatened? At first glance, it seems positive that the public is holding the president more accountable during times of conflict. It would appear that the electorate is mobilizing to fulfill their duties in guiding the government through difficult times. However, statistical results also show that Civic Duty, Media Exposure, Education and Age all explain more deviation in participation than war, indicating that citizens with well-defined political opinions and of higher social status normally correlated with increased education and income are better predictors of participation than war. This suggests that even in times of war, political elites in America are more likely to voice their concerns and desires than the average citizen, creating the reality of unequal representation demonstrated by Lipjhart (1997). The dominating influence of political elites could be especially troubling in times of war when the impacts of conflict may be most directly borne by the working class.

Also troubling is the impact media exposure may have on participation during times of war. In most situations, media exposure is beneficial to citizens as they attempt to form political opinions. Theoretically, though, the tremendous power of influence the media possess over a normally uninformed public may be heightened in times of war. It is possible that the media may significantly alter public opinion and impact the sentiments they convey to elected officials. With this power should come great

responsibility; however, issues deemed newsworthy are often driven more by ratings than by an ethical obligation to provide unbiased, factual information to the information-poor public. As a result, public opinion may be more easily manipulated by unscrupulous reporting during times of war than ever before.

It is good for the legitimacy of American democracy that citizens are motivated to act during times of war, especially in a redefined world of increasing security concerns and challenges to the American national identity. Analysis of past behavior shows that war does shape the way people interact with their government; a trend expected to carry forward into post-9/11 efforts to fight terrorism. While only detailed analysis will determine if currently increased focus on foreign and defense issues has similar effects on participation in America, it is promising to see the legitimizing impact previous wars have had on citizen involvement in government.

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## APPENDIX A

### VARIABLE DEFINITIONS



Table A1

*Variable Definitions*

Variable/NES Question Number	Response Range	Comments
Y <sub>1</sub> = Participation Index VCF0702 VCF0717 VCF0718 VCF0719	0=4, low to high	Index was computed from multiple NES questions. Completion of each activity increases score by one. NES questions ask if respondent voted, tried to influence others to vote, attended political meetings or worked for a party or candidate, respectively.
Y <sub>2</sub> = Vote/not vote VCF0702	0=No, 1=Yes	
X <sub>1</sub> = War Year VCF0825	0=No, 1=Yes	
X <sub>2</sub> = Age VCF0102	1-7, low to high	1=17-24 year olds, 7=75-99 year olds, other numbers represent respective 10-year intervals.
X <sub>3</sub> = Gender VCF0104	1=female, 0=male	
X <sub>4</sub> = Education VCF0110	1-4, low to high	1=0-8 grades 2=12 grades or fewer 3=13 grades or more but no degree 4=college or advanced degree
X <sub>5</sub> = South/non South VCF0113	1=Non- South, 0=South	
X <sub>6</sub> = Income VCF0114	1-5, low to high	Income scored on 0-100 percentile in relation to other responses in respective year. Cumulative percentiles recoded to five-point scale.

Table A1 (continued)

*Variable Definitions*

Variable/NES Question Number	Response Range	Comments
X <sub>7</sub> = Partisanship VCF0305	1-4, low to strong	Partisanship scale collapsed from 7-point Likert scale asking political party affiliation. 1=independent or apolitical 2=leaning independent 3=weak partisan 4=strong partisan
X <sub>8</sub> = External efficacy VCF0648	0-100, least to most	Index included in NES data file derived from multiple efficacy measures.
X <sub>9</sub> = Gov't responsive VCF0649	0-100, least to most	Index included in NES data file derived from multiple responsiveness measures.
X <sub>10</sub> = Trust in gov't VCF0656	0-100, least to most	Index included in NES data file derived from multiple trust measures.
X <sub>11</sub> = Media exposure VCF0728	1-5, low to high	Index included in NES data file derived from multiple efficacy measures.
X <sub>12</sub> = Financial situation VCF0880	1-3, better, same, worse	
X <sub>13</sub> = Civic Duty VCF0702 VCF0714	1=voted when thought race was not close, 0=other	Variable was created by comparing responses from vote/not vote question with answers concerning impression of closeness of presidential race.

## Note:

In all instances, cases scored as “do not know, inapplicable, did not respond or depends” were deleted.

APPENDIX B

DATA CORRECTION

Control variables with missing cases were assigned values equal to the sample mean for that variable in an effort to maintain as large of a sample size as possible.

Table B1 indicates the extent of value substitution:

Table B1

*Data Correction*

Variable	Total N	Variable N	# Cases Replaced	% Cases Replaced	Old Mean	New Mean
X <sub>2</sub> = Age	21134	21045	89	0.42%	3.59	3.59
X <sub>3</sub> = Gender	21134	21134	0	0.00%	1.56	1.56
X <sub>4</sub> = Education	21134	20973	161	0.76%	2.35	2.35
X <sub>5</sub> = South/non South	21134	21134	0	0.00%	1.72	1.72
X <sub>6</sub> = Income	21134	19698	1436	6.79%	2.88	2.88
X <sub>7</sub> = Partisanship	21134	21003	131	0.62%	2.84	2.84
X <sub>8</sub> = External efficacy	21134	19716	1418	6.71%	56.76	56.76
X <sub>9</sub> = Gov't responsive	21134	15915	5219	24.69%	56.26	56.26
X <sub>10</sub> = Trust in gov't	21134	16324	4810	22.76%	35.19	35.19
X <sub>11</sub> = Media exposure	21134	16174	4960	23.47%	3.26	3.26
X <sub>12</sub> = Financial situation	21134	14518	6616	31.31%	1.92	1.92
X <sub>13</sub> = Civic Duty	21134	21134	0	0.00%	0.1962	0.1962

Notes:

Total N represents the total sample size available.

Variable N represents the number of valid cases per variable.

Number of cases replaced represents the number of cases replaced with the mean variable value.

Old mean and new mean represent the variable means before and after case replacement.

## Biography

Dan Marine, Captain, United States Air Force, attended Arizona State University on assignment from the Air Force Institute of Technology. In the Air Force, Captain Marine works as an Aircraft Maintenance Officer and has been stationed in Sacramento, California and Okinawa, Japan. After earning a Master of Arts degree in Political Science, Captain Marine will be assigned as an academic instructor at the United States Air Force Academy located in Colorado Springs, Colorado where he will mentor and teach future Air Force officers. Dan is married to Michelle Shafer Marine and enjoys flying, skydiving and woodworking as hobbies. He can be contacted via email at [danmarine@hotmail.com](mailto:danmarine@hotmail.com).